

Chicken by QueerOnTilMorning

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Summary:

Richie used to be the undefeated champion of Gay Chicken, but Eddie's been planning his downfall.

1. Chapter 1

It started when Eddie yelled "Let's take our shirts off and kiss!" He was trying to distract Richie, to gain an edge in their arm-wrestling, but it had the opposite effect. The sky opened up, a light shone down on Richie, a choir of angels sang "Shirtless Eddie!" in harmony, and Richie *slammed* Eddie's arm down on the table.

"Do not fuck with me, dude," he said, breathless with laughter. "I am the fucking *emperor* of Gay Chicken."

Or:

It started twenty-seven years earlier, in the quarry.

"Drool more, why don't you," Richie stage-whispered as Ben watched Beverly climb out of the water, freckled skin against the white of her skivvies.

Ben turned strawberry red, but said nothing. Stan, however, swiped his arm across the surface of the water, sending a wave toward Richie's face.

"Leave him alone, dickbag," Stan said. "Not like you weren't looking too."

"I would never!" Richie gasped, pretending to be scandalized. He didn't know why that was his instinct--to loudly oversell that he wasn't checking out Bev, so no one would realize he actually *wasn't* checking out Bev. He never did, even when she was splashing around in her underwear. Maybe that was weird, but at least it saved him the trouble of being part of the whole Bev-Ben-Bill love triangle.

"If you weren't looking, there's something wrong with you," Stanley said casually.

Richie's stomach clenched, because that was too close to what he kept thinking as the summer stretched on. As he always did when that nervous feeling threatened to take hold, he drowned it out by getting louder and goofier. "Stanley, my dahhhling," he crooned in a not-quite-there Southern Belle Voice, "how could you accuse me of such a thing? You know I only have eyes for you."

"Fuck off, " said Stan, but he was laughing--everyone was laughing, Bill and Ben and especially Eddie, and Richie would never in a million years stop doing something that was making Eddie laugh.

"Don't leave me, Stan, I never betrayed you in my heart," he shrieked, and everyone howled with laughter until Stan dunked him, and that was how Richie figured out that it was very, very funny to pretend he was in love with another boy.

"Oh, big talk," Eddie said at Jade of the Orient, rubbing his knuckles where Richie had knocked them against the table. He was pink and laughing and wine-drunk. Richie, meanwhile, had thrown back his body weight in shots and still felt way too sober, way too aware of every inch of his skin, every tremor of his voice.

"Undefeated since '89," he said with a wide, forced smile. *What the fuck are you doing?* he asked himself. *You are forty years old and you're an actual gay person. This is demeaning. Stop it.*

"I'm gonna make you eat that smile," Eddie said, and, still laughing, climbed right the fuck into Richie's lap.

The more times you repeated a joke, the funnier it got, that was Richie's rule of thumb. And this joke, the one where he loved boys, was so hilarious he just couldn't stop telling it.

He pulled a fistful of dandelions from his yard and presented them to Mike on bended knee. (Mike called him a nerd and bopped him on the head with the weeds.) He asked Bill to prom. ("Sorry, dude, but I know you c-can't dance for shuh-hit," Bill said.) He held a boom box over his head on Eddie's lawn. (Eddie didn't even come to the window before Sonia Kaspbrak threatened to spray him with the garden hose.)

And he *flirted*. He touched. He held hands and rested his head on shoulders. He wrapped his arms around waists. Sometimes he kissed cheeks.

Because it was funny. It was all so fucking funny. And Richie Tozier would do anything to get a laugh.

Bill was the first one to say the word, *that* word, in a sentence about Richie. It was the day they were listening to the radio in the Barrens, and "1, 2, 3" by Miami Sound Machine came on. Richie, whose love for Gloria Estefan was much less of a joke than he let on, jumped up to serenade Eddie.

"They tell me you're shy, boy, but I want you just the same," he crooned, taking Eddie's hand and pulling him to his feet.

"Oh my God, Richie, what the fuck is your problem," Eddie said, but he laughed and let Richie twirl him around in a vague approximation of salsa. Richie tugged Eddie back toward him, one arm around his back, painfully aware of Eddie's thighs, inches from his own. Eddie's eyes were bright and so close.

"What's up?" said Ben, emerging from the trees.

"Nothing much," Bill said without looking up from his horror comic. "R-Richie and Eddie are playing gay ch-hicken, as usual."

Richie stumbled, but he didn't drop Eddie's hand. "Fuck are you calling chicken?" he snapped, as though that were the word that stole his balance.

"Gay chicken," Bill repeated. "You know, when you act gay and try to f-f-fr-eak each other out."

"Oh, like this?" said Richie, and he grabbed Eddie and dipped him into a deep backbend. Their chests pressed together. He could feel Eddie's pulse, leaping.

"Get off me, you creep," yelped Eddie, and squirmed out of Richie's arms.

Richie raised his hands as though acknowledging an adoring crowd. "Tozier for the win!"

Richie's chair creaked dangerously as Eddie straddled his thighs. The other Losers whooped with laughter, because this was such a good joke, one they all remembered fondly.

Eddie pouted his lips like an Instagram thirst trap, not that Richie would know, because he didn't follow that kind of guys. "Richie, you have no idea how long I've waited for this moment," he said in a low, slow voice. "When I would finally defeat you."

He leaned in and kissed the side of Richie's neck, just below his ear.

Fuck.

This could not be happening. This was Richie's bit, and Eddie was stealing it, and it wasn't fucking funny at *all*, because even after all that tequila Richie was starting to get hard. Jesus, no. He tried to think unsexy thoughts, but all he could focus on was Eddie shifting in his lap, Eddie's lips on his skin, and if Eddie felt Richie rising to the occasion this would quickly become a different kind of joke.

Richie put a hand on Eddie's chest, pushed him back just slightly until they were eye to eye.

Softly, he said, "You look so much like your mom from this angle."

It took a second for Eddie's face to shift from confusion into outright horror, but then-- "Oh, *fuck*, Trashmouth, that's *disgusting*, go *fuck* yourself!" He practically leapt out of Richie's lap. Richie dropped his head back, laughing so hard he felt like he might throw up.

"Wow," said Bill. "Just... wow."

"That is fucking *cheating*, " Eddie shouted indignantly, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "You're supposed to be gay, not--not fucking *gross* !"

"Fuck you! I can multitask!" said Richie triumphantly, not thinking at all about how Eddie had settled on top of him like he felt right at home there. "Tozier! Is! Still! Unbeatable!"

The day Richie stopped playing gay chicken was the day he wasn't sure if he won or lost.

It was a Saturday early in their senior year of high school, and he arrived at the clubhouse to find Eddie in the hammock. No one else was there. Eddie didn't have a comic book or anything; he was just lying back with his hands laced behind his head, one foot slung over the side, lazily swinging.

"Hey, Eds," Richie said, trying to ignore the feeling he'd been getting in his stomach lately whenever he was alone with Eddie. It was a loud feeling, the kind that made him want to tell a lot of jokes very fast. "Whatcha doing?"

"Thinking," said Eddie, not looking at Richie.

He didn't say "don't call me Eds." He never said that, when it was just the two of them.

"Thinking about what?"

Eddie shrugged and said nothing.

"Aww, come on," said Richie, taking a few steps into the space between them. "Give me a hint. Are you daydreaming about the

handsome boy who sits behind you in French class? Hoping he'll take you to the movies and put his arm around you in the dark?"

"You sit behind me in French class, dickhole," said Eddie.

"Question still stands."

"Sometimes I daydream about you shutting up, how's that?" But at least Eddie was smiling.

Richie wiggled his eyebrows as he kicked off his shoes and slid into the hammock next to Eddie. He'd shot up another six inches this year; with their feet tangled together, he could rest his chin on top of Eddie's head. "You know what's a good way to shut a guy up?"

"Guillotine?"

"Ooh, kinky. And French. Not where I would have gone, but I like it."

Beside him, Eddie shifted, rolling toward Richie. The small movement took them from side-by-side to nearly face-to-face, and Richie tensed. Eddie's knee was between his thighs. Richie had already thrown an arm around Eddie's neck, and now Eddie laid his palm carelessly on Richie's waist.

"Where would you have gone?" Eddie's breath against Richie's neck was so, so warm.

"Where would...?" Richie was kind of losing track of what they'd been talking about. Eddie's hand wasn't just *on* his waist, it was *gripping* him, pulling Richie closer so their hips nestled against each other, and most of Richie's already meager attention span was currently devoted to telling himself *don't, DO NOT, don't you dare get a boner.*

"What was your suggestion? For shutting you up. Because I'm all ears, Richie, seriously." His hand curled, slipped *under* the hem of Richie's shirt to touch bare skin. Richie felt every crease and whorl of Eddie's fingerprints like a brand. "I'll do whatever it takes."

"Eddie," he whispered, confused, almost frantic--what the *fuck* was happening?

"I'm listening." He said it right into Richie's ear, so close Richie could hear the wetness of his lips.

Fine. Fuck it. "I guess I had something like this in mind," Richie said, and he tipped Eddie's chin up with his fingers and kissed him on the mouth.

He pulled back almost instantly, waiting for Eddie's reaction, for the laugh or the gag that was surely coming. If Eddie laughed, Richie would laugh too. He would laugh the longest and hardest of anyone, and he'd tell this story over and over to their friends, so they could all join in the laughter.

But Richie wasn't going to laugh *first*.

And after a moment, it occurred to him that Eddie wasn't going to laugh either.

Eddie was looking back at him with those big brown eyes, cheeks red under his freckles, breathing shallow. Slowly, he ran his tongue over his lower lip, as though tasting where Richie had been.

Richie couldn't help himself. It was too much. He closed the space between them and copied the gesture. He licked Eddie's bottom lip, and Eddie responded by opening his mouth, as though inviting Richie's tongue inside, and, well, it would have been rude to refuse.

Okay. Okay! They were kissing. Despite the story Richie had made up about the girl he met at the carnival last summer, this was his first kiss. He was kissing Eddie Kaspbrak. And, judging from the way Eddie was sliding his hands up Richie's back under his shirt, and the little moaning sounds he was making into Richie's mouth, Eddie was *into it*.

Richie was definitely getting a boner. And Eddie could definitely feel it. Richie knew, because *he* could feel *Eddie's* boner, and holy shit, he couldn't think about that too much or he'd lose control completely. "Eds," he murmured as Eddie's fingernails raked down his back. "Is this for real?"

He felt Eddie smile against his mouth. "Thought this was supposed to shut you up."

"Come on, I was quiet for like a whole minute. Personal record."

Eddie pressed his thigh into Richie's groin, and Richie whimpered. He'd be embarrassed about that later, when he was capable of thinking about things. "Have you thought about this before?" Eddie asked.

"No. Kind of. I mean, I've been trying really hard not to think about it. Like, for years."

"I know what you mean." Eddie pushed his fingers through Richie's curly hair. He took a deep breath, then said, "What do you want to do now?"

Richie stuck out his lower lip in a caricature of deep thought. "Hmm," he said. "Blow jobs?"

It was the wrong thing to say. Richie had a lot of experience saying the wrong thing, and he was intimately familiar with the sudden sinking feeling. He understood that he had fucked up before he fully processed that Eddie's face had gone pale and stricken, that Eddie was pushing away from him, scrambling out of the hammock and landing awkwardly on the dirt floor.

"Shit," said Richie, struggling to sit up, the hammock swinging haphazardly. "Eds, I'm sorry, I went too far. I'm--" He was trembling and sweating, still hot with arousal, and now the added burn of shame.

"No. Fuck. I don't..." Eddie covered his face and breathed heavily. "You don't have to be sorry. It's not your fault."

But Richie knew better.

They sat there in silence for a few interminable seconds. Then Eddie went to the ladder.

"Please don't tell anyone about this," he said, before climbing up and out of the clubhouse.

Richie let out a long, shaky sigh. "Richie Tozier, world champion of gay chicken," he said to the empty hole in the ground.

In the bathroom of Jade of the Orient, he splashed water on his face and glared at himself in the mirror. "Richie Tozier, world champion," he said to his reflection. When he went back out to the table, no one seemed to notice that his eyes were red.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Getting things right wasn't exactly Richie's wheelhouse. He didn't have a ton of practice.

For a little while Richie felt like an asshole. Everyone else was laughing and reminiscing and catching up, and he was moping in his corner, dragging the group's collective mood down. Then fucking monsters and shit started coming out of fortune cookies, and everyone got on Richie's level, which was a whole bunch of *why the fuck did we come back here*.

Derry was full of pain and fear and shame and regret. Derry was a town-sized closet and an infinity of sewers. Derry had given him nothing except the knowledge that no one would ever love him back, and now, probably, a debilitating phobia of Chinese food. Fuck Derry. Let the fucking clown eat the whole place for all Richie cared.

And *then* they found out Stan was dead.

Richie was out of here. It didn't matter what Bev said, he decided. So what if she had seen his death in the deadlights? No one who had kept track of Richie's consumption of various substances over the last decade would have come to the conclusion that he was planning on having a long and healthy life. What would be the point? He had no family, no close friends, not even a pet. All he had were shitty jokes, occasional, anonymous hookups, and the freshly recovered memory of scaring away the only guy he'd ever--

No. Not going down that path.

So: dying? Richie Tozier was not that strongly opposed to the concept of dying. He was a *lot* more afraid of the clown. Of what it might do to him before he died. What it might show him. What it might say. What someone else might hear and remember, after Richie was gone.

But even more than the clown, Richie was afraid of Eddie Kaspbrak.

He had hoped. That was the terrible, awful, shitty *stupid* thing, the thing reaching tendrils up his throat to choke him with his own idiocy. When he'd gotten the call from Mike, he had thought of Eddie. He hadn't thought of Eddie in more than twenty years, but suddenly he remembered him so clearly, his freckled cheeks and his big eyes and his quick, sharp mouth, the way they'd chase each other around the Barrens and fall down laughing, Eddie forgetting there was supposed to be anything wrong with his lungs.

God, Richie had *adored* him. He'd fallen asleep thinking about Eddie just about every night--filthy thoughts sometimes, sure, but just as often his fantasies revolved around holding Eddie's hand, or giving him something that would make him smile. The precise details of the gift were hazy, but it would make Eddie catch his breath and say *it's perfect, how did you know?* and he would look up at Richie with surprise and joy and something else, something new and dangerous and oh, so deeply worth the risk.

How long had it been since Richie had met anyone worth the risk? Or anyone willing to risk it for him?

When Mike called, Richie remembered that Saturday in the hammock. The day he didn't pretend his feelings were a joke. The day

Eddie kissed him back . For a second, an instant, Eddie moved toward Richie instead of away. He had gone over the memory so many times, in the weeks and months after it happened, that it was thumbed smooth and soft; still, twenty-three years later, he was certain of that detail. Eddie had kissed him *back* .

And then Eddie had run away, had climbed up a ladder and out of that moment where they had touched and tasted each other and Richie had been honest for once, for fucking once. Eddie had been unable to bear that honesty, when they were seventeen. When Mike called, Richie thought--hoped--that maybe he could bear it now.

Stupid.

When Eddie straddled his lap in the restaurant, the color high in his cheeks, Richie had known that the ember of longing he'd unwittingly kept alight all these years was his to carry alone. Eddie didn't feel it. If he did, he couldn't possibly have touched him that way, with that look in his eyes, with all of them laughing. Either Eddie didn't remember that day in the clubhouse, their kiss that left a scar on Richie's heart even when he forgot Eddie's name--or he remembered and wanted Richie to know it meant nothing. Richie wasn't sure which was worse, to be forgotten or to be a joke.

A thought ran through his head sometimes, when he was really low. In college, when his roommate said *get the fuck out or I'll kill you in your sleep*. When he finally acknowledged that his parents were never going to pick up the phone. When Carter packed his bags and said *I can't live with someone who's ashamed to love me*. When the burly dude who ran the open mic broke his nose. When he woke up still drunk the next morning, never having found his way home, because he didn't really have one. When it got bad, Richie would think, *I should have died when--* and then be unable to finish the sentence.

Now he knew how it ended. He should have died when they fought it. He should have gone out a hero, the best and bravest he'd ever been, surrounded by the only people who ever loved him. Richie had never been strong like that again, not in twenty-seven years.

He still wasn't. He couldn't do it. He couldn't face that thing again, and more, he couldn't face himself again, couldn't stand knowing himself the way he did here in Derry. This fight would demand their deepest strength, their truest selves, and Richie had spent too fucking long burying that boy to risk digging him up again and putting a weapon in his hand. He'd take the smaller, quieter death Bev had foretold, far away from any great battles between good and evil. And when he was gone, he'd be forgotten, or a joke--the only things he had ever been good for.

Richie waited until the Townhouse was quiet, until he was sure his friends were asleep. He thought about leaving a note, but all he could say would be *please don't hate me*, and that was unfair to ask of them. Of anyone. He picked up his bag and hoped his fate would find him soon.

His door opened before he touched the handle. He'd forgotten to lock it.

Well, this is fine, he thought with a terror so intense it became calm. If I get killed before the third act, no one's even going to be mad at me.

Eddie Kaspbrak walked into Richie's room.

"No," Richie said out loud. "Not him. Be anyone but him." As if he could bargain with It. As if he hadn't been expecting this--after all, what had he ever feared more? Why wouldn't It wear this face to take his life?

Eddie stopped, looked confused. "What the fuck does that mean, dickwad?" He took in Richie's appearance--fully dressed, bag over his shoulder--and confusion shaded toward anger. "Are you *leaving*? "

Richie shrugged, suddenly uncertain. Was this really Eddie? Why would the real Eddie come to Richie's room in the middle of the night? In a threadbare v-neck and gray sweatpants?

But why would the monster just... stand there looking at him, a mixture of hurt and frustration on Its borrowed face?

"Eds, what are you doing here?" The lights were off in Richie's room, the better to enact his escape without being noticed, and Eddie was a shadow against shadows, a coiled energy Richie felt more than saw. He seemed like the real Eddie, *real* in a way Richie couldn't define, but that made him feel shivery and split open.

"I'm..." Eddie hesitated, then took a step toward Richie. "Finishing something. That I started. Earlier."

Richie didn't know what to do with that. "Are you sure this isn't about murdering me?"

"It fucking can be about murdering you if you don't shut up," Eddie said, which was weirdly about the most reassuring thing Richie could have heard right then. That was Eddie. It was too Eddie to be counterfeit.

"Okay," said Richie, and shut up.

Eddie took another step, and now they were within arm's reach. He extended a hand, and Richie steeled every part of himself against flinching, but all Eddie did was grab the strap of Richie's backpack and slide it down his arm. Richie stood perfectly still until it thumped to the floor.

"Don't leave," said Eddie.

Richie said nothing. He wouldn't make that promise, not now.

Eddie huffed out a frustrated breath. "You didn't win, you know," he said.

Richie was supposed to be shutting up, but--"You gotta give me a dispensation for asking what the fuck you're talking about, Eds, because this is really--" Richie lost track of what he was saying as Eddie took another step, this one traversing the invisible threshold right into Richie's personal space. Richie stepped back; Eddie stepped forward again.

We're dancing, Richie thought, flashing back to that day in the Barrens, to Gloria Estefan and the smell of spruce trees, Eddie's hips mirroring his own. To Ben's footsteps splashing, Bill's comic book pages rustling, Eddie's hand in his, hotter than the summer sky. *Gay ch-hicken*, Bill stammered in his mind.

"You didn't win," Eddie repeated.

The back of Richie's knees hit the hotel bed, and he couldn't back up anymore. Eddie moved in, so close Richie could smell his breath--minty, of course; Eds would have flossed, brushed, and used mouthwash before getting changed for bed--and looked up at Richie. There was something in his eyes like a question, or maybe a dare.

Eddie placed his hand square in the middle of Richie's chest, and Richie felt each one of his fingers through his shirt like a line of fire. He looked down at Eddie's hand, the shape of it so clear, so familiar, even in the dark, even after more than twenty years. He watched as Eddie made a fist, bunching up the well-worn cotton of Richie's black T-shirt. *Why would* --Richie had time to think before Eddie was yanking him down into a kiss.

It wasn't the gentle, questioning kiss of teenagers sharing a hammock. There was heat in the way Eddie's mouth collided with Richie's, a fire fueled by so many emotions built up over the years--not just desire, but fear and regret and anger and shame. Richie's lips parted in an involuntary sound of shock, and then Eddie's tongue was pushing into his mouth without waiting for permission. Intruding, exploring, ransacking. Richie groaned in baffled desperation. Belatedly, he met Eddie's tongue with his own, giving back almost as good as he was getting.

Eddie pulled away, his breathing ragged, and Richie had a split second to be disappointed before Eddie was *shoving* him back onto the bed, not at all gently. Not that Richie was complaining. About anything. At all. Ever again.

Eddie straddled his thighs like he had in the restaurant, but he wasn't laughing now. Richie was sprawled on his back, his head still spinning with surprise and disorientation and the sudden, almost catastrophic redirection of all available blood to his dick. Jesus Christ, he couldn't remember the last time he'd gone from zero to raging so fast. Eddie sat like that for a moment, head cocked and looking at Richie as if considering his options, and then swooped down on his mouth again. His hands pinned Richie's to the mattress above his head as he kissed him ferociously.

Pushing his hips off the bed, Richie pressed his cock against the cleft of Eddie's ass. *Oh God*. He could feel Eddie's hardness grinding between them--could feel it with astonishing clarity. Eddie Kaspbrak had walked into his hotel room in the middle of the night wearing sweatpants with nothing underneath, and now Richie could practically map the veins on his dick, because Eddie was brutally hard *from kissing him*.

Eddie caught Richie's lower lip in his teeth and tugged gently. "What the *fuck* ," Richie whispered as Eddie released him, as Eddie dipped his head to Richie's throat, licking and biting. Richie keened, fingers digging into the blankets above his head.

Then Eddie sat back, looking at Richie in that same considering way, and Richie's brain caught up with him.

Don't fuck this up, it roared at him, like waves of common sense

crashing against an indifferent yet horny shore. *Don't you fuck this up like last time.* Last time he and Eddie kissed, Richie took it too far, too fast, and ruined everything. Now he understood he'd been living with that regret, though unable to name it, for the last twenty-three years.

Don't do it again, he pleaded with himself. *Get it right this time.*

But how?

Getting things right wasn't exactly Richie's wheelhouse. He didn't have a ton of practice.

Should he reach for Eddie like he wanted to, pull their bodies back together and keep kissing him? Should he let his hands slide down Eddie's back to knead the muscles of his ass? Did he dare to touch Eddie where he was hard, to let him know how fervently Richie wanted to make him feel good? How much could he ask for, how much could he offer without scaring Eddie away?

The pause had gone on too long, Richie realized, his heart a stone dropped into deep water. Whatever answer Eddie had been waiting for, Richie had failed to give it. Eddie was backing off the bed.

Richie just lay there and watched him go.

Again.

"Chicken," Eddie said as he stood over him, and Richie said nothing, still stuck trying to respond to a moment that was long past.

At the door, Eddie looked back. "Don't leave yet," he said, and this time Richie answered, "I won't."

Notes for the Chapter:

Why is this the only fic tagged "let's take our shirts off and kiss"? It's so lonely!

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie and Eddie have to face their fears.

Richie lay on top of his covers, fully clothed, until sunrise. Un-fucking-believable. He had gotten another shot, and he'd fucked it up *again*.

And now he couldn't even run away and hide, because he'd told Eddie he wouldn't.

So here he was, stuck in Derry, listening to Mike explain how they had to split up and delve into their childhood memories to find a significant blah, blah, blah. Richie had *known* it was going to be some facing-your-fears bullshit like this. Fucking exposure therapy. Why did they have to go all hero's journey? Why couldn't they just find a really big rock and smash it on the clown's freakish, swollen head?

I hate this, he thought as the Losers went their separate ways. *I hate this*, he thought as he caught sight of the dilapidated arcade. *I really fucking hate this*, he thought as he plummeted headlong into the memory of Henry Bowers' cousin, all curly hair and furtive smile. Such a slender thread of a moment had passed between them, he probably wouldn't remember it now--except.

Except (*I hate this*) that Henry Bowers saw. And instead of breaking, that thread became a chain. Except (*I hate this*) that Henry Bowers screamed at him, screamed ugly words, ugly words for the ugly truth of Richie's heart. Except (*I hate this*) that this was the first time Richie truly felt ashamed; this memory was the grit that became the pearl of Richie's whole fucking self-loathing deal.

The one thing about the day Richie didn't hate--and he would never, ever share this with anybody, even if he lived through whatever was coming, even if he lived to be a hundred--was killing Henry Bowers. It wasn't exactly awesome, and he did hurl immediately afterward, but then he felt... better. Maybe facing your fears wasn't so bad, if you had an ax in your hand.

Richie kept sneaking looks at Eddie, as they made their way through the house on Neibolt Street. It was dumb. He knew it was dumb. He was probably about to die, but he couldn't stop staring at the man who had kissed him the night before--the man he'd loved his whole, pointless, soon-to-be-concluded life. He couldn't stop thinking about the heat of Eddie's lips, about the strength of Eddie's slender hands pinning Richie's wrists to the bed, about feeling Eddie so clearly through his soft sweatpants.

He watched Eddie's mouth, his big dark eyes, his hands which were always moving. His whole body had pressed Richie's down into the bed. Richie still ached with the loss of it.

Was Eddie sneaking looks back at him, or was he imagining things?

Why didn't he fucking go for it, on what was probably his last night on Earth? Why didn't he grab Eddie and pull him back down onto the bed? Why didn't he kiss him and touch him and beg him to stay? And why--Jesus fuck, why--couldn't he stop thinking about this, before he had to climb down into a monster clown's lair with a half-hard dick?

Bizarrely, it was Eddie who faltered, Eddie who almost backed out, on the threshold of hell below Neibolt Street. "I can't do it," he

gasped, and Richie saw the fear he recognized from twenty-three years ago. Eddie had looked at Richie that way after they kissed in the clubhouse. Seeing the same terror now, it was--eviscerating. If Eddie ran, it was over for Richie.

I would die before I'd let anything happen to you, he thought, and just the words in his head made his cheeks warm. He should just say it, consequences be damned. Say it, and kiss him, and die without secrets.

But what if that only scared Eddie more?

"You're braver than--" than me, so much braver than me, I've never been anything but a coward and I wouldn't even be here now if I wasn't crazy with hope that any moment I'll find the courage to tell you how I feel--
"than you think."

"Thanks," said Eddie, but his eyes fell and Richie knew he was disappointed. At least they had that in common.

And they climbed down into the pit.

Behind door number one: a closet. "I see what you did there," Richie mumbled, and Eddie gave him a look he couldn't decipher. Then half of a dead child danced toward them and the symbolism started to feel a little opaque, so they got the fuck out.

The second door opened, and Richie's heart fell through the floor. They were looking into the clubhouse, and he knew instantly what day they were seeing. He and Eddie stood perfectly still for a moment, staring at their younger selves.

Eddie in the hammock, seventeen and still just a skinny little thing, not yet subtly shaded in with muscle. Richie coming down the ladder, all legs and shoulders and needing a haircut. The cool moist air, the scent of dirt, all of it humming with anticipation.

"Hey, Eds," said the teenage version of Richie, in a voice he thought was nonchalant, but which to his adult ears fizzed with barely concealed yearning. Teenage Eddie turned his head to look at him, and their eyes met with a *click* that vibrated through the space.

"Nope," said the adult Richie. "Fuck this." He took a step backward, but his Eddie (no, not *his* Eddie, just the Eddie he arrived with) stayed still.

"Richie," that Eddie said, like not quite a question.

"Dude, I can't," Richie said.

Eddie nodded and closed the door, shutting out the clubhouse and their first kiss and everything that went with it. "Um," he said. "Do you think we should, you know..."

"What? Talk about it?" Richie rubbed his hands over his face. This was not the time. *(When will it be the time, Richie? What if the time already came and you missed it? How much more time do you think you have?)* "What's the fucking point, Eds? Richie Tozier fucked things up again, film at 11."

Without waiting for an answer, he opened the third door.

They looked out onto the dead, weed-laced front yard, and beyond that Neibolt Street, empty and waiting in the sunshine. "Holy shit," said Eddie behind him, but Richie was already moving.

Yes, a voice in the back of his head piped up some important points--they were way the fuck underground; it was the middle of the night; the whole point of coming here had been to kill the fucking clown, which they had not, as of yet, done--but, Christ, it was a way out. It was blue sky and good light and the whole world in front of him, and everything in Richie's body screamed *go!*

He made it three steps before Eddie had him by the collar.

Eddie might have been a little dude, but he was muscular where Richie was bony and he knew how to plant. "We can't go this way," Eddie yelled in his ear. "This is fucking fake. It's a gazebo."

"What the fuck does that mean?" Richie shouted back, and then the smell hit him. It wasn't the fresh air he was expecting; it wasn't the stench of the sewer, or the ancient dank of Its lair. It was the smell of rot, of disease, of festering and pus--a bitter, sick smell with a horrible edge of sweetness. Richie gagged. "Oh, *shit* --"

There was a rustling, frantic noise, and Eddie appeared around the corner of the house, stumbling and running and crying. This was a younger Eddie than he'd just seen in the clubhouse, a sapling of a boy with his socks pulled up his hairless calves, and Richie understood immediately that he was looking into *that* summer. The real Eddie, the adult Eddie, hauled backward on Richie's arm, but his feet felt stuck in place.

Behind Eddie came a shambling horror. Its arms were too long, and its skin peeled like old wallpaper, and parts of its *face* were missing, greasy bone showing through maggoty flesh. This was where that suffocating smell came from. It reached out for the younger version of Eddie, making hideous noises--coughing, gagging, groaning in pain--that somehow resolved into words. "Come back, kid," the zombie. "Don't you want a blow job? I'll do it for a dollar. I'll do it for free."

"Fuck you!" screamed Eddie over his shoulder

Richie wasn't thinking coherently; his consciousness narrowed to the horrible awareness that, as fast as Eddie could run, that-- *thing*-- was faster. It was gaining on him. Richie had to stop it.

But his shirt collar was choking him. "It's not real," the adult Eddie yelled again.

"We have to help--him--you! We have to--"

"It's just a memory," Eddie insisted, still trying to pull him back through the door. "I got away. It's not really happening."

As he said that, the putrescent thing on the lawn stopped, swiveling its head to lock its eyes on the two of them. "Oh, Eddie," it said, its voice a grotesque parody of a lover's. "You came back."

Then it crouched like a cat and *leapt* at them.

Richie's recoil combined with Eddie pulling him back sent them both tumbling through the door, and Eddie raced to slam it shut. "Fuck, fuck, God dammit," Richie panted. "What the fuck was *that*?"

"The leper," Eddie said in a small, dry voice. "That's how I first saw It."

Richie nodded, took a deep breath. "Okay," he said. "Fuck. Fuck today, have I said that yet? Today fucking sucks. I hate it."

"What, you hate spending time with me?" Richie didn't know how Eddie could find it in himself to smirk, under these circumstances. Much less how he could manage to make it--kind of sexy. Even with an extra breathing hole in his cheek.

"Not exactly my idea of a great date," Richie said with more bitterness than he intended. Then, trying to make up for it, he added, "Although I can't complain about the company."

"Fair enough," said Eddie. "You can pick what we do next time."

What literally the *fuck* was going on here, Richie would like to know. Was this *flirting*?

"Okay," he said, which was the cleverest, most seductive thing he could come up with at the moment, and he opened the second door again.

Teenage Richie and Eddie were making out in the hammock. Just... really going at it. Richie looked away from them and headed toward the ladder.

"Richie?" said Eddie behind him.

"Look, we have to pick a door. Two of them have monsters, one has humiliating, traumatic rejection." He tried to keep his voice light. "I think the fact that I picked this one is a sign of personal growth, okay, but let's not hang out here longer than we have to."

"Richie," whispered the Eddie in the hammock, his voice thick with desire, and listening in on this felt every kind of awful--invasive, disorienting, dreadful with regret.

The Richie in the hammock made a small, choked sound, and Richie's face scalded with shame. But after a moment, he realized this was

wrong. His younger self's gasp was out of place in this memory; it sounded like fear, not lust. "Oh, fuck, no," said Eddie, the adult Eddie, and Richie finally turned around to look at their younger avatars.

For a moment, it looked just like he remembered: the two of them tangled in the hammock, thighs interlocking, Eddie's hands in Richie's hair. Then he saw that his younger self was tense, struggling--trying to break free of Eddie's grasp.

"Go," said Eddie, beside Richie, his voice low and urgent. "Get out of here."

"Why?"

"Because I've had this nightmare and I know what happens."

"Shit." Without thinking, Richie took a step toward the two boys. Just as he did, past-Eddie finally let go of past-Richie. Past-Richie tumbled out of the hammock with a thump.

"This isn't how it went," said Richie.

"I told you, it's a fucking nightmare. It's not real, and it was never real, so fucking keep moving, asshole," Eddie snarled, sounding close to panic.

"Eddie," said the Richie on the floor, and his voice was terribly afraid.

"Eddie, what did you do to me?"

Richie saw in horror that his younger self's face was crumbling. The rot started around his mouth, like a necrotic stain from Eddie's kiss, and spread outward as he watched. Skin cracked and peeled, turned gray and dead. A sick white boil bloomed just below his eye. "Eddie?" teenage Richie asked again, his voice quavering.

"Oh, fuck, I'm so fucking sorry," whispered Eddie--the real Eddie, the one standing behind Richie. "Richie, I'm sorry, I didn't know."

The younger Richie wiped a hand across his face. A curling flap of skin came away with it. He didn't seem to notice the two middle-aged men in the room; he stared at the boy he'd just been kissing. "You're sick," he said in dawning realization. "You're sick and you made *me* sick. Why would you do that, Eddie?" Fat tears rolled down teenage Richie's face, and Richie's stomach heaved as he realized they were eroding bloody crevices in his flesh.

"I didn't know," Eddie repeated.

"Eds, it's not real," said Richie, but Eddie's eyes were locked on Richie's younger self. Then young Richie turned and fixed his gaze (one eye swelled hideously, almost sagging out of the socket) on Eddie. *His* Eddie.

"You knew," young Richie spat. His lips cracked and bled, but the blood looked old, half-scabbed. "You knew you were sick, and dirty, and wrong, but you still put your hands on me. You *wanted* me to be sick like you."

"I didn't mean to," Eddie insisted. The younger Eddie was still slumped in the hammock, not responding to anything. He was--he was an empty puppet, Richie realized. Set aside, while the puppeteer worked elsewhere.

"You did this to me, Eddie," the young Richie-thing sobbed, and there was a strange echo in his voice, like something else was repeating Richie's lines. "You made me sick, and I *hate* you."

"Thanks, we've had enough of this bullshit," Richie said, stepping forward. "Go ahead and close our tab."

His younger self flicked his--its--eyes to him, and their pupils were ugly gold. "Not your turn right now," it said. "Don't worry, there's games for everyone if you wait patiently."

"Fuck you," said Richie. "You're not me. I could never hate Eddie, you cheap knockoff bitch."

"Oh, no?" The thing barely looked like him anymore. Its teeth were long and stained. "Never hated the way he made you feel? The way he just walked out on you? Turned you into a freak and then left you out to dry? Wasn't it lonely, Richie? I'm so lonely. Eddie got you to admit it, you twisted fuck, he made you think someone else might feel the same way and then he left you here with your dick in the breeze. You'd be pathetic if you didn't hate him."

Richie laughed without smiling. "Maybe I'm pathetic," he said.

"Maybe if I hadn't wasted so much time feeling sorry for myself, I would have realized that my best friend was hurting and tried to figure out how to help him." He glanced at Eddie, speechless beside him. "Sorry about that, dude, that's on me. But I never--" he shifted his gaze back to the living, moldering corpse of his younger self-- "I never, not for a fucking *second*, hated Eddie. He didn't make me sick. I'm *not* sick. The only way either of us is sick is that we're *sick of your tired, manipulative shit*."

And Richie grabbed his younger self by the throat.

The clubhouse gave a huge shudder and collapsed on top of them. "Richie!" he heard Eddie scream. He wanted to duck, but didn't dare release his stranglehold on the thing pretending to be him. He braced himself for the onslaught of rocks and dirt.

It didn't come. The clubhouse was gone--not reduced to rubble, just not there anymore. They were standing in that massive cavern again, and Richie had his hands around the neck of--a dog?

A dog. A fluffy little Pomeranian, squirming in his hands, snapping its head from side to side in search of air. Why the fuck was he choking out a--

"Richie, don't let go!" Eddie screamed, and then the dog opened its jaws wide, twice as wide as the size of its head, wider still, showing huge, very undoglike fangs that dripped reeking venom. With its legs, which it suddenly had way too many of, it scrabbled at Richie's body,

trying to push itself free. The fuzzy little fucker was strong. Richie almost lost his grip.

Then Eddie was beside him, wrapping his hands over Richie's, sharing his strength. "Guys, help us, we fucking got it, come help!" Eddie was screaming, and then they were all there.

It changed shape again and again, writhing and deforming under Richie's hands, sometimes buzzing, sometimes slithering. It burned, then prickled, digging hooks into his flesh, and still he held fast. Everyone was shouting all around him--"you can do it, Richie, don't let go"--and he squeezed and squeezed and fucking squeezed, every muscle in his body a tightrope across an abyss, and he felt It starting to get tired.

It wriggled. It spasmed. It went limp in his grasp. It was just a clown, mortal after all, face going red under Its greasepaint for lack of air.

"Hold It just like that," Mike yelled, and then he stuck his hand through Its chest and yanked out Its heart.

Someone's hand brushed against Richie's as he felt around the silty bottom of the quarry for his glasses. He couldn't see anything in the swirling, murky water, but he knew the touch was Eddie's. The fingers grazed the back of his hand; then they laced through his own, palm to palm.

They rose to the surface like that. When Richie finally had his glasses back on his face, he saw that Eddie was watching him intently, something at the corner of his mouth that might have been a smile.

Richie swallowed hard, and looked away.

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie and Eddie face their fears again. It's more fun this time. [Here Be Smut]

After a truly self-indulgent shower and an even more self-indulgent amount of pizza, Richie was back at the hotel bar, drinking and laughing with the victorious Losers and avoiding Eddie's gaze. Everything he felt--everything he was starting to piece together, from the glimpses he'd been given into Eddie's fears--it was too much. He didn't know what to do with it all, so he pushed it to the back of his mind and focused on drinking Bill and Mike under the table.

Beverly and Ben were in their own world, apparently having whole unspoken conversations in the form of heartfelt gazes and caressing each other's hands. Richie couldn't decide if he was more grossed out, envious, or thrilled for them. Eddie sat to the side while Richie, Bill, and Mike did shots, waving away their offers of drinks and looking lost in thought.

"I think I know how my movie should end now," Bill said.

"It's terrible," said Richie immediately.

"You haven't even heard it," Bill snapped.

"Hate it," Mike agreed.

"Fine. Fuck you both," said Bill, but he was laughing. "What's everybody else doing when they get home?"

"Packing as much as I can fit in a carry-on, and never coming back," said Mike.

"Where do you want to go?" Bev asked without looking away from Ben.

"Somewhere with more black people than rural Maine," said Mike. "So that narrows it down to... any-fucking-where." Bill cackled drunkenly. "I have some savings. Maybe I'll see how many states I can hit before I run out of money."

"I'm getting a divorce," said Bev, and Richie felt that queasy mix of happy and jealous again when he saw Ben's face.

"I'm gonna come out," Richie said. It sounded too loud, and he looked down at his empty shot glass so he wouldn't see anyone's face.

Ben, bless his painfully straight heart, actually said "Come out to where?" Then he made the kind of sound someone would make if Bev had kicked him under the table.

"Oh, shit, Rich, that's great," Bill said, harmonizing with Beverly's "I'm proud of you." "Thanks for telling us," said Mike. Eddie very loudly said nothing.

"Yeah, I realized today that I might die and not be remembered as a gay icon," Richie said, still not looking up. "That's, like, pretty unacceptable."

Bev laughed. "Honey, if you want to be a gay icon you've gotta get some better clothes."

"You want to make me a gown for my debutante ball, Marsh?"

"Fuck yes!" she said, while Mike said, "Please don't make me picture Richie trying to dance."

"I'm a great dancer!" Richie protested, scrambling to his feet. He grabbed Mike by the hand, but the taller man stayed firmly in his chair while Richie wiggled his hips. "Come on, shake your body, baby, do the Conga!"

"I will shake nothing," said Mike solemnly.

Eddie stood up. "Guys, I don't know if it's the being awake since yesterday, or the killing a monster, or jet lag, or what--"

"You live in this time zone," Richie reminded him.

Eddie ignored him. "--but I'm fucking wiped out. I need to sleep for

like two straight days. Don't anybody leave without waking me up to say goodbye, okay?" He looked once at Richie, a long, considering look, and then left the room.

"We love you, Eddie," Bev yelled after him. If he heard, he didn't reply.

Richie waited all of three seconds before saying, "You know what, I think I'm gonna turn in too."

Bill and Beverly exchanged a meaningful look. "Good idea," Bill said.

"Really?" Mike asked, and Bill glared at him. Mike shrugged. "Okay, we're pretending to believe Richie's going to sleep. I don't know why we're pretending that, but fine. Sweet dreams, Tozier."

Richie stared at Mike, who looked back without expression. Bill and Beverly avoided Richie's gaze. Ben furrowed his brow in heterosexual bewilderment.

"Oh, fuck you guys," Richie said, and walked away. He undermined his own dramatic exit by turning around in the doorway and saying "I love you all so fucking much and I'm really glad none of you died." Bill waved him off with a *yeah, yeah* gesture.

Instead of going to his own room, Richie went to Eddie's, where Eddie was standing with his arms folded, waiting for him. *Christ*, Richie wanted to kiss him. Instead he stood six feet away, not

knowing what to do with his hands.

"What the fuck is going on with you?" said Eddie. "Am I completely misreading this whole situation?"

"I don't know, dude. Am I misreading your wedding ring?" Richie meant it as a joke, something to lighten the mood, but it came out bitter and harsh.

Eddie's eyes widened. "Richie--"

"No, look, let me say this." Richie felt drunk and stupid and sad and brave. He made himself meet Eddie's eyes. "I know you dealt with some shit back then and I can tell it's been hard. I'm really sorry I wasn't there for you. And I get that you want to, like, exorcise your sexual hangups or whatever, and that's awesome, I support that so much, but it just--it can't be with me, okay? I wish it could, I wish so *fucking* bad, Eds, but I can't be your self-discovery fuck." Looking at Eddie was too much; Richie squeezed his eyes shut and forced the last part out. "Because I'm so fucking in love with you."

"What?" Richie opened his eyes to see Eddie looking confused.

"I'm in love with you," Richie said. "Sorry. I know it's inconvenient. But if you sleep with me and then go back to your wife, I think it might kill me."

Eddie burst out laughing.

"Thanks," said Richie, flushed with shame and anger, his eyes burning. "That's exactly how I hoped my declaration of love would be received."

"No, no, I'm just--" Eddie shook his head. "It's funny that someone as smart as you can be so dumb. I love you, Richie, but you're dumb sometimes."

"You what?"

Eddie took a step toward him. "You think I'm going back to my wife? After everything? After I realized that my whole--that my whole life has been built on my mom fucking *lying* to me, telling me I was weak and needed someone to take care of me, and I only married Myra because I couldn't remember it was a lie?" Another step. "I'm not going back."

"Oh." Richie blinked. That sounded like good news. But--

"Dude, come on. Do I have to spell it out for you?" Once again, Eddie was fully in Richie's personal space, tilting his head back to look Richie in the eye. The angle of his neck made his jaw look excessively lickable.

"I... guess so?"

"Richie. *Richard*. You gorgeous infuriating absolute idiot. I'm leaving my wife because I'm in love with you."

"How did you make calling me by my full first name sound both hot and insulting?" Richie asked before his brain caught up. "Wait. You are?"

Eddie huffed in irritation. "You know how the scariest thing the clown could think up to fuck with me, the whole my-worst-nightmare-come-to-life moment, was me hurting you and you hating me?"

"Yeah," Richie said, reeling.

"Okay. You know why that's my worst nightmare?"

It was a leading question, so Richie allowed himself to be led. "Because you love me?"

"Gold star, dumbass," said Eddie.

"Okay," said Richie. Eddie's breath was warm on his face. "That's good. I love you too."

"Oh my God, do I have to do everything around here?" said Eddie, and he stood on tiptoe, cupped Richie's face in his hands, and kissed him.

Whatever facade of self-control Richie had left crumbled. He moaned into Eddie's mouth, lips parting for that hot, seeking tongue. There was no more second-guessing, no more holding back. As Eddie's hands came up to rake through Richie's curly hair, Richie's hands groped for the swell of Eddie's ass. He dug his fingers into the muscle there, pulling Eddie's hips toward him and rocking against his groin.

"Fuck," Eddie whispered into his mouth. "Fuck *you* ." He panted into Richie's ear, licked his neck, sucked at his collarbone. Eddie's mouth was everywhere, somehow talking all the while. "Fuck you for walking around looking like that, with those fucking *arms*, giving me those fucking *looks* of yours. Fuck you for making me wait this long." He punctuated every "fuck" with a roll of his hips.

Richie was hanging onto coherence by a thread, his dick so hard he thought he might scream. "Okay," he managed, grinding his erection against Eddie's through their pants, the feeling both tantalizingly intense and nowhere near enough.

"Okay?" Eddie bit his earlobe, a little too hard. Richie shoved his hands under Eddie's shirt in response, dragging his fingernails down Eddie's sides.

"Okay. Fuck me for making you wait." Eddie's hands in Richie's hair tightened into fists, and yeah, that was really good. "Teach me a fucking *lesson* , Kaspbrak."

Eddie pulled back a little, his hands still in Richie's hair, studying his face. "Yeah? Is that what you want?"

"Shit, yes, babe," Richie whimpered. "Show me who's in charge." He wanted it so much he could barely breathe: Eddie taking control, Eddie using him.

Eddie made a visible effort to calm himself down, taking a deep breath and swallowing hard. "We don't have to do it like that, Rich," he said carefully. "You don't... I mean, you don't actually owe me anything. I don't want to push you too far. I want to be good to you."

"I want you to use me like a fuck doll," Richie said.

Eddie's mouth fell open, and he made a sound that seemed to come from his very core, molten and irresistible. His eyes were huge, his lips kissed raw. The naked want in his face carved out Richie's insides, left him desperately, ravenously hungry.

"Yeah, all right," Eddie said, and pulled Richie in for a searing kiss. It was wet and vicious, Eddie's tongue practically fucking his mouth, making little rhythmic *uh uh uh* noises. Richie swayed on his feet, clinging to Eddie's hips to keep from losing his balance completely.

"Night, boys!" Beverly trilled from the hallway, through the open door.

Eddie and Richie flinched apart. "Um," said Richie. "Night, Bev."

They stared at each other. After a moment, Eddie threw back his head and laughed. Richie burst into giggles that verged on hysterics. "You want to get the door?" Eddie asked, still laughing, and Richie pulled it shut.

"So much for subtlety," Richie said.

"Did you want to be sneaky about this?" asked Eddie. "Because I was planning to make you scream my name." Richie trembled, the words going straight to his dick.

"Subtlety is overrated," he managed to say. Regaining a little of his composure, he added, "Besides, I'm gonna have to scream if I want you to hear me over the sound of Bev and Ben consummating their love."

Eddie grinned. "Hey, it's not a contest." He stepped close to Richie again and ran his hands over his chest, brushing his nipple through his t-shirt and making Richie gasp. "But we're totally gonna win."

"You have some competition issues, don't you?" Richie asked, allowing Eddie to pull his shirt off.

"No," said Eddie indignantly. "It's just, if I'm going to do something, I want to do it well." He took his own shirt off in one smooth motion and threw it on the floor beside Richie's. "And right now, what I want to do is you." God, the way he said *you* was thrilling, the way that word seemed to take in everything Richie had ever been or could ever be and--and *claim* it, mark it as his own.

Richie was in so far over his head. And he loved it.

"This is still about you wanting to win gay chicken, isn't it?" he murmured into Eddie's hair as Eddie sucked a bruise into his neck.

"No, dickhead," said Eddie. "I already won. This, right here..." He rubbed the heel of his hand over the bulge in Richie's pants, and Richie shuddered ecstatically. "This is not a fucking game."

"Jesus, Eds," Richie groaned. Then a thought occurred to him. "Do you, uh--do you have condoms? Or, like, lube?"

Eddie hissed with disappointment. "No. Fuck. And I'm sure there's nowhere open."

"Damn. I mean, we could still--I don't mind if you--"

"No," Eddie said, cutting him off. "Next time. You've got another hole I can use." Richie flushed. Eddie looked at him closely again, searching his face for any sign of reluctance or discomfort. Richie could only assume that he found nothing there but desire so intense he could barely contain it.

"Yeah, Eds," he said, knowing everything he felt was obvious in his voice, in his eyes, in the way his hands roamed over Eddie's torso, savoring the ridges of muscle, the deep v leading down to the

waistband of his sweats. It was okay. He didn't have to hide it. He was allowed to want this, because Eddie wanted it too. "Any way you want. I'm yours."

"You're mine," repeated Eddie, looking as awestruck as Richie felt. He ran a thumb gently over Richie's cheekbone. The gesture made Richie's heart stutter.

"Do you want to lie down?" Richie asked. "Or do you want me on my knees?"

"On your knees," Eddie whispered, and that was all Richie needed to hear. He knelt, tugging Eddie's sweatpants down over his hips. Once again, Eddie wore nothing underneath, and his cock practically leapt free of the waistband.

Richie's breath caught when he saw it. "God, you're fucking gorgeous, Eds," he said. "Can I?"

"You'd better," said Eddie.

Richie gripped the base of Eddie's cock in one hand, the other holding his thigh. He licked at it slowly at first, tracing a vein, then swirling his tongue around the flare of the head. Above him, Eddie made a strangled sound. His hands rested tentatively in Richie's hair.

Richie looked up at Eddie. "Pull my hair, babe," he said.

"Are you sure?"

" Yes, " said Richie, and he must have sounded convincing, because Eddie grabbed two fistfuls of curls and pulled his head back down.

Richie had always been kind of neutral about sucking cock. He was happy to do it if someone wanted it, he wasn't *selfish* , it just didn't particularly get him going. Usually he had to use one hand to keep himself hard until he was done. Under normal circumstances, Richie would prefer getting fucked any day of the week.

But this wasn't normal circumstances. This was *Eddie*.

As Eddie gently but firmly guided Richie's mouth down onto his cock, Richie moaned. It wasn't for show. The way his lips stretched--the weight of Eddie on his tongue--the ocean smell of his sweat--it was all doing something to him, making him feel wanton and wild. It was so intimate, so real. This was Eddie's tender skin, Eddie's blood pulsing hot underneath. Richie let his jaw hang slack, taking as much of Eddie as he could, desperate for more of that taste.

"You look so good like this," Eddie said softly. Richie looked up at him through his eyelashes. Eddie's face had a strange expression, one that took Richie a moment to place. Eddie didn't look stressed, for maybe the first time since they'd come back to Derry. He looked at peace. Maybe even happy.

Richie wanted so badly to make him happy.

He flicked his tongue against the underside of Eddie's cock, satisfied by the grunt that elicited. Eddie's thighs were tense, muscles twitching, as Richie worked him deeper. The slide of Eddie's velvet skin against the wet of his tongue was fucking incredible; Richie felt, for the first time, as though his mouth were hard-wired to his dick, every reflexive thrust of Eddie's hips sending waves of desire through his whole body.

Richie sucked in his cheeks, his hand moving slowly at the base of Eddie's cock. He took Eddie even deeper, teasing the back of his throat. God, that felt so dirty and *good*. How had he never realized that the inside of his mouth was so sensitive, that getting fucked like this could feel so amazing? Richie moaned again, and Eddie's hips jerk in response.

"Richie, baby, I'm so fucking close," Eddie groaned. Richie whimpered. Being called *baby* while swallowing Eddie Kaspbrak's cock was more than he'd ever dared to dream of. He looked up at Eddie, hoping the desperate, lustful sounds he was making were sufficiently communicating *don't stop, I want it so bad*. Eddie's hands tightened in his hair. Richie grabbed Eddie's thighs with both hands, using them to pull Eddie even deeper into his mouth, fucking his own face with Eddie's cock.

"Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck, *Richie*," Eddie growled. He went perfectly still for a long second; then his hips jolted forward again and he was coming in a hot rush down Richie's throat. Richie gripped his thighs like a lifeline, swallowing and swallowing until it was done.

Richie sat back on his heels and smiled up at Eddie--what must have been an incredibly smug, self-satisfied smile.

Eddie took a long, shuddering breath. "Fuck, Richie, that was amazing." He sighed as he met Richie's eyes. "And you look... so fucking beautiful and well-used."

"Was I good for you?" Richie asked shyly. He wondered if this had been Eddie's first time with a man, but figured this wasn't the time to ask.

"So goddamn good. You did such a good job taking my dick, baby." Richie felt warm all over. "Now, what can I do for--"

He was interrupted by a long, deep groan from the room next door. Eddie's eyes widened, and they both stifled laughter. It was a male voice. "Should have known Ben would be the one getting noise complaints," Richie whispered.

"Wait a second," said Eddie, pointing in the opposite direction from where the groan had originated. "Aren't Ben and Bev's rooms at that end of the hall?"

"Shit, Mike, goddamn," said the groaner. Richie jumped to his feet, pressing his hands over his mouth to stop a gleeful shriek.

Mike and Bill?! Eddie mouthed at him.

"Did you know?" whispered Richie. Eddie shook his head. "Me

neither. Wow. I guess it's true that slaying a monster makes you hungry and horny." Richie could tell from Eddie's face that he hadn't caught the Buffy reference, but no matter. "Think they have condoms in there?"

"You are not going to go bang on their door right now," said Eddie.

"No, there's still plenty of banging to be done in here," Richie said with a smirk. On the other side of the wall, Bill was making frankly pornographic sounds, and Richie was honestly finding it kind of hot. He glanced down at his erection, then back up at Eddie.

"I should blueball you for that stupid pun," said Eddie, but instead he put his hands on Richie's shoulders and kissed him, not seeming to mind where Richie's mouth had just been. After a moment, he pulled back and said, "But I'm obviously not going to. So what should I do to you instead?"

"Eds, I have to tell you, sucking your dick was pretty much the hottest thing that's ever happened to me. It doesn't matter what you do. The second you touch me, I'm gonna go off like the fucking fourth of July."

"Yeah?" Eddie bit his lip thoughtfully. "Maybe I shouldn't touch you, then."

Even to his own ears, the noise Richie made sounded like a kicked puppy. "Eds," he whined.

"Maybe I should make you touch yourself instead," said Eddie. He licked Richie's neck. "While I watch you and tell you what a good job you're doing." Richie squirmed. "Oh, you'd like that more than you want to admit, wouldn't you?"

"I'm... yeah, maybe I would," Richie said. "Another time." Even though Eddie had already mentioned "next time," saying the words himself made Richie feel like he was jumping into the quarry, falling through empty air, not quite sure where he'd land or how many pieces he'd end up in. "But I'm dying for you, Eds. I want you... God, I need you to make me come."

Eddie smiled a slow, wicked smile. "On the bed," he said.

Richie was barely sitting down before Eddie was on him, pushing him back like he had the other night, pinning his arms above his head. Richie was bigger and in decent shape, and Eddie had both of his wrists in one hand--he could have broken Eddie's hold if he'd wanted to, but he didn't want to. He loved this, loved being immobilized while Eddie kissed him, sloppy and deep.

Eddie's free hand slid to his groin, rubbing where he was so hard it hurt. "Yeah, yeah, please," Richie begged. For a moment, both of Eddie's hands disappeared; Richie felt his jeans and boxers being quickly, tidily stripped away. Then Eddie was above him again, spitting into his hand and wrapping it around Richie's cock.

"Christ," Richie choked, thrusting into Eddie's fist. He hadn't been exaggerating; his whole body was humming, tension braided through every muscle, desperate to be released. This was going to be over fast.

Eddie leaned over him, pinning him with those big, dark eyes just as he'd pinned him with his hand a moment ago. "Don't think you're off the hook," he said. "I'm still going to fuck you til you can't walk, first chance I get."

"Please, please, please," Richie chanted, as Eddie jerked him harder, faster. "Want you so bad."

"Yeah, you want me to fuck you? Want me to stretch you out so I can give it to you hard and deep?"

"Fuck, yes, please, Eds." Richie's hips pumped erratically, losing any semblance of rhythm as he neared the brink.

"I love you so fucking much, Richie," Eddie said, his breath warm in Richie's ear, and that was what pushed him over the edge. Teeth clenched and head flung back, he cried out as he came, splattering both their stomachs.

Eddie flopped onto his side next to Richie and stroked his hair as his heartbeat slowed. After a few minutes, he said again, "I love you."

Richie nuzzled against Eddie's shoulder. "You mentioned."

"I'm gonna keep mentioning. You're gonna get bored of hearing it."

"Never," said Richie sincerely. "No fucking chance. I went twenty-seven years without hearing it or saying it. There's no way it's ever getting old." He sighed, drifting in the sound of Eddie's heartbeat. "I love you too, by the way."

A few minutes later, Eddie said, "Should we shower?"

"Ugh," Richie mumbled. "In the morning."

"You're so gross," Eddie said, but he didn't move to get up.

"I know. I'm disgusting," Richie agreed. "Marry me."

Eddie didn't pull away at that, but the hand stroking Richie's hair stilled. "What?"

Richie looked up at his face. Eddie's expression was strange. "Well, not tomorrow or anything. I know you have to get divorced and all that. But, you know, eventually. Marry me."

Eddie didn't say anything for a long moment, during which Richie landed in the quarry only to find it full of hot lava and broken glass. Reflexively, he tried to hide the pain with a joke.

"Chicken," said Richie. "I win."

The smile Eddie had been holding back spilled across his face, and he kissed Richie--a soft, unhurried kiss, decadent with the promise of more to come. "Nice try, bitch," he whispered against Richie's lips. "You don't win if I say yes."

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for reading! ❤️